



May 11, 2009

Representative Mark Meadows
Chair
House Judiciary Committee

Dear Representative Meadows:

The most basic of human rights is the expectation of safety – safety to live, work and be part of a community. This human right is not reality for many in our state who become victims of crime because of their race, religion, disability or sexual orientation.

The Michigan House again will be considering the Michigan Anti Bias Crime-HB 4836. This legislation addresses bias motivated crime, enhancing the current Michigan hate crime law, while making it easier for law enforcement officers and prosecutors to enforce the law.

The bill would change current law in a number of important ways. It adds disability and sexual orientation to the list of groups whose long experience with bias would qualify for hate crime. It places the focus on motive, so that someone who targets a particular group for a crime can be charged whether it turns out that the victim was actually a member of the targeted group or not. It applies to victims selected for associating with a targeted group – for instance, whites working with African Americans for civil rights if attacked by the Klan. Civil penalties would remain independent of criminal charges so a victim can sue regardless of what police and prosecutors decide. It covers crimes against both private and public property and recognizes hateful symbols (like a noose) as

altering property even if no physical property damage results and allows appropriate charges.

For those who believe this legislation is not necessary, it is important to look at the facts. Michigan has the third highest number of reported hate crimes in the country according to the Federal Bureau of Investigations and is the most segregated state in the country according to the U. S. Census Bureau. These startling statistics illuminate the need for stronger enforcement of the law.

Bias motivated crime also has extensive economic repercussions. Diversity and inclusion are more important than ever to succeed in today's new economy. Our state is experiencing a critical transition, moving from a factory based economy to a knowledge based economy. We must retain and attract young, educated people from all walks of life from around the world to become prosperous once again. Assurance that they will be protected from hate crimes regardless of their national origin, religion, race, disability or sexual orientation will help those individuals.

The purpose of the Michigan Anti Bias Crime Statute is to unite Michigan communities against those who seek to divide. Support for it does not endorse a particular lifestyle choice, any more than support for anti-bias legislation involving religion constitutes support for any one denomination or belief. It allows people the right to feel safe and not be concerned they will be harmed because of their race, religion, disability or sexual orientation. It is a step toward building inclusive and economically successful communities.

The Michigan Roundtable supports the adoption of HB 4836.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Thomas Costello".

Thomas Costello
President and CEO